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Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique

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> *"I often quote concepts, texts and phrases from Marx, but without feeling obliged to add the authenticating label of a footnote with a laudatory phrase to accompany the quotation. As long as one does that, one is regarded as someone who knows and reveres Marx, and will be suitably honoured in the so-called Marxist journals. But I quote Marx without saying so, without quotation marks, and because people are incapable of recognising Marx's texts I am thought to be someone who doesn't quote Marx. When a physicist writes a work of physics, does he feel it necessary to quote Newton and Einstein?" (Foucault 1980, p. 52).*

Étienne Balibar once wrote that Foucault's work is characterised by some kind of "genuine struggle" (1992, p. 39) with Marx, this struggle being one of the principal sources of its productivity.[1] According to Balibar, Foucault moved in his theoretical development from a rupture with Marxism as a theory to a "tactical alliance", the use of some Marxist concepts or some concepts compatible with Marxism. I completely agree with this observation and indeed I would like to deal in more detail with one of these concepts, the concept of governmentality. At the same I don't think Balibar is right in stating that the difference between Marx and Foucault is due to the fact that the latter adheres to a "materialism of the body" . In fact, Balibar does not take into account the important theoretical changes in Foucault's work especially after the publication of the *History of Sexuality, vol. 1* (1979) which resulted in the appearance of the problematics of government, which is much closer to a Marxist perspective than Balibar observed.

In this paper I would like to address two questions: (1) why does the problem of government assume a central place in Foucault's work? and (2) how could this concept serve to analyse and criticize contemporary neo-liberal practices?

1. The genealogy of governmentality

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Foucault's work after *Discipline and Punish* (1977) is characterised by two seemingly disparate projects. On the one hand, there is his interest in political rationalities and the "genealogy of the state", that he investigates in a series of lectures, articles and interviews. On the other, there is a concentration on ethical questions and the "genealogy of the subject", which is the theme of his book project on the "History of sexuality". The "missing link" between these two research interests is the problem of government. It is a *link* because Foucault uses it exactly to analyse the connections between what he called technologies of the self and technologies of domination, the constitution of the subject and the formation of the state. It is *missing*, because Foucault developed the notion in his lectures of 1978 and 1979 at the Collège de France and the material is almost entirely unpublished, at the moment available only on audio tape. Since in the 1980s Foucault concentrated on his "History of Sexuality" and the "genealogy of ethics", the problematics of government as the greater context of his work, is still quite unknown.

The lectures of 1978 and 1979 focus on the "genealogy of the modern state" (Lect. April 5, 1978/1982b, p. 43). Foucault coins the concept of "governmentality" as a "guideline" for the analysis he offers by way of historical reconstructions embracing a period starting from Ancient Greece through to modern neo-liberalism (Foucault 1997b, p. 67). The semantic linking of governing ("gouverner") and modes of thought ("mentalité") indicates that it is not possible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationality underpinning them. But there is a second aspect of equal importance. Foucault uses the notion of government in a comprehensive sense geared strongly to the older meaning of the term and adumbrating the close link between forms of power and processes of subjectification. While the word government today possesses solely a political meaning, Foucault is able to show that up until well into the 18th century the problem of government was placed in a more general context. Government was a term discussed not only in political tracts, but also in philosophical, religious, medical and pedagogic texts. In addition to the management by the state or the administration, "government" also signified problems of self-control, guidance for the family and for children, management of the household, directing the soul, etc. For this reason, Foucault defines government as conduct, or, more precisely, as "the conduct of conduct" and thus as a term which ranges from "governing the self" to "governing others". All in all, in his history of governmentality Foucault endeavors to show how the modern

sovereign state and the modern autonomous individual co-determine each other's emergence (Lect. Feb. 8, 1978/1982b, p. 16/17; Foucault 1982a, p. 220-1; Senellart 1995).[2]

The concept of governmentality has correctly been regarded as a "key notion" (Allen 1991, p. 431) or a "deranging term" (Keenan 1982, p. 36) of Foucault's work. It plays a decisive role in his analytics of power in several regards: it offers a view on power beyond a perspective that centers either on consensus or on violence; it links technologies of the self with technologies of domination, the constitution of the subject to the formation of the state; finally, it helps to differentiate between power and domination. Let's take up one aspect after the other.

(1) In criticizing the juridical model Foucault in his work until the mid 1970s saw the central mode of power not in law and consensus but in war and struggle ("Nietzsche's hypothesis") (see e.g. Foucault 1997a, pp. 15-9). But even in his negation of the juridical-discursive concept of power he remained inside this problematic of legitimation and law. In claiming that the strategic conception should provide the "exact opposite" of the juridical model, Foucault accepted the juridical model by simply negating it: instead of consensus and law, he insisted on constraint and war, instead of taking the macro-perspective of the state and centring on the power-holders he preferred to investigate the microphysics of power and anonymous strategies. In sum, the aim was to cut off the king's head in political analysis, displacing the focus on law and legitimisation, will and consensus. But by rejecting the juridical model and adopting the opposite view, Foucault reversed it. Instead of cutting off the king's head, he just turned the conception that he criticised upside down by replacing law and contract by war and conquest. Put differently, the "cutting off" could only be the first step. After this, it is necessary to address the following question: "How is it possible that his headless body often behaves as if it indeed had a head?" (Dean 1994, p. 156).[3]

Introducing the problematics of government Foucault takes up this question. He now underlines that power is foremost about guidance and "Führung", i.e. governing the forms of self-government, structuring and shaping the field of possible action of subjects. This concept of power as guidance does not exclude consensual forms or the recourse to violence, it signifies that coercion or consensus are reformulated as means of government among others, they are rather "elements" or "instruments" than the "foundation" or "source" of power

[2] It is beyond the scope of this presentation to give a summary of these courses (see Lemke 1997, 2001 and Gordon 1991). Instead in this paper I want to show why the concept of governmentality occupies a central place in Foucault's work and how it could be used as a tool to critisize contemporary neo-liberal strategies.

relationships (Foucault 1982a, pp. 219-222). "Foucault's hypothesis" – as I propose to call it by contrast of Nietzsche's hypothesis – is characterized by inquiring into the conditions of a consensus or the prerequisites of acceptance. As a consequence, the concept of governmentality represents a theoretical move beyond the problematics of consensus and will on the one hand and conquest and war on the other: "The relationship proper to power would not therefore be sought on the side of violence or of struggle, nor on that of voluntary linking (all of which can, at best, only be the instruments of power), but rather in the area of the singular mode of action, *neither warlike nor juridical*, which is government" (Foucault 1982a, p. 221; emphasis added).

(2) This takes us to the second feature of governmentality. Governmentality is introduced by Foucault to study the "autonomous" individual's capacity for self-control and how this is linked to forms of political rule and economic exploitation. In this regard, Foucault's interest for processes of subjectivation does not signal that he abandons the problematics of power, but on the contrary, it displays a continuation and correction of his older work, that renders it more precise and concrete. It is right to speak of a „break" but this rupture is not between the genealogy of power and a theory of the subject, but inside the problematics of power. The concept of power is not abandoned but the object of a radical „theoretical shift" (Foucault 1985a, p. 6). Foucault corrects the findings of the earlier studies in which he investigated subjectivity primarily with a view to "docile bodies" and had too strongly stressed processes of discipline. Now the notion of government is used to investigate the relations between technologies of the self and technologies of domination (see Foucault 1988a):

"I think that if one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western civilization, he has to take into account not only techniques of domination but also techniques of the self. Let's say: he has to take into account the interaction between those two types of techniques – techniques of domination and techniques of the self. He has to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, he has to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination. The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we can call, I think government. Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word, governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts

[3] Two French marxist thinkers, Michel Pêcheux and Nicos Poulantzas, were among the first to address these theoretical problems and tried to formulate a productive critique of Foucault's conception of power

between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself" (Foucault 1993, p. 203-4).

(3) Foucault introduces a differentiation between power and domination which is only implicit in his earlier work. He insists that "we must distinguish the relationships of power as strategic games between liberties – strategic games that result in the fact that some people try to determine the conduct of others – and the states of domination, which are what we ordinarily call power. And, between the two, between the games of power and the states of domination, you have governmental technologies" (Foucault 1988b, p. 19). It follows that Foucault identifies three types of power relations: strategic games between liberties, government and domination.

Power as *strategic games* is a ubiquitous feature of human interaction, insofar as it signifies structuring the possible field of action of others. This can take many forms, e.g. ideological manipulation or rational argumentation, moral advice or economic exploitation, but it does not necessarily mean that power is exercised against the interests of the other part of a power relationship; nor does it signify that "to determine the conduct of others" is intrinsically "bad". Moreover, power relations do not always result in a removal of liberty or options available to individuals, on the contrary power in the sense Foucault gives to the terms, could result in an "empowerment" or "responsibilisation" of subjects, forcing them to "free" decision-making in fields of action.

Government refers to more or less systematized, regulated and reflected modes of power (a "technology") that go beyond the spontaneous exercise of power over others, following a specific form of reasoning (a "rationality") which defines the telos of action or the adequate means to achieve it. Government then is "the regulation of conduct by the more or less rational application of the appropriate technical means" (Hindess 1996, p. 106). For example in his lectures on the "genealogy of the state" Foucault distinguishes between the Christian pastorate as a spiritual government of the souls oriented to salvation in another world and state reason as a political government of men securing welfare in this world. In much the same way disciplinary or sovereign power is reinterpreted not as opposite forms of power but as different technologies of government.

Domination is a particular type of power relationship that is both stable and hierarchical, fixed and difficult to reverse. Foucault reserves the term "domination" to "what we ordinarily call power" (1988b, p. 19). Domination refers to those asymmetrical relationships of power in which the subordinated persons have little room for manoeuvre because their "margin of

(Poulantzas 1977; Pêcheux 1984).

liberty is extremely limited" (1988b, p. 12). But states of domination are not the primary source for holding power or exploiting asymmetries, on the contrary they are the effects of technologies of government. Technologies of government account for the systematization, stabilization and regulation of power relationships that may lead to a state of domination (see Hindess 1996; Patton 1998, Lazzarato 2000).

2. Neo-liberalism and critique

How could this theoretical framework be used for a critique of neo-liberalism? The relevance and the potential contribution of the concept of governmentality might become clearer if we compare it with the dominant forms of criticism of neo-liberal practices. Very schematically we will find three main lines of analysis that are shared among a large alliance from sociologists like Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu to proponents of Marxist theory – even if their respective political and theoretical positions may themselves differ considerably. First, neo-liberalism is treated as a manipulative "wrong knowledge" of society and economy, which has to be replaced by a right or emancipatory, which means scientific or "impartial" knowledge. Often criticism focuses on "inherent contradictions" or the "faulty theory" of neo-liberalism that could not stand the light of the "true" laws of society and the "real" mechanisms of politics: Neo-liberalism as an ideology. Second, critics see in neo-liberalism the extension of economy into the domain of politics, the triumph of capitalism over the state, the globalisation that escapes the political regulations of the nation-state. This diagnosis is followed by the appropriate therapy: The (defensive) strategy aims to "civilise" a "barbaric" capitalism that has nowadays gone beyond control, the emphasis is put on re-regulation and re-embedding: Neo-liberalism as an economic-political reality. The third line of criticism is levelled against the destructive effects of neo-liberalism on individuals. We could cite the devaluation of traditional experiences neo-liberalism promotes, the process of individualisation endangering collective bonds, the imperatives of flexibility, mobility and risk taking that threaten family values and personal affiliations: neo-liberalism as "practical anti-humanism".

While these three forms of critique point out correctly to some important effects of neo-liberal government, they are at the same time characterised by serious limits and short comings. The main problem is that they undertake a critique of neo-liberalism by relying on the very concepts they intend to criticise. They operate by confronting knowledge and power, state and

economy, subject and power, and we may well ask what role these dualisms play in constituting and stabilising liberal-capitalist societies. I think the critical contribution of the concept of governmentality for the study of neo-liberal governmentality lies exactly in "bridging" these dualisms, trying to analyse them on a "plane of immanence" (Deleuze). By coupling forms of knowledge, strategies of power and technologies of self it allows for a more comprehensive account of the current political and social transformations, since it makes visible the depth and breath of processes of domination and exploitation. Let's elaborate on this point a bit by turning to each line criticism in more detail.

2.1 Rationality and Reality

The first important aspect of the concept of governmentality is that it does not juxtapose politics and knowledge but articulates a "political knowledge". Foucault does not pose the question of the relation between practices and rationalities, their correspondence or non-correspondence in the sense of a deviation or shortening of reason. His "main problem" is not to investigate if practices conform to rationalities, "but to discover which kind of rationality they are using" (Foucault 1981, p. 226). The analytics of government not only concentrates on the mechanisms of the legitimisation of domination or the masking of violence, beyond that it focuses on the knowledge that is part of the practices, the systematisation and "rationalisation" of a pragmatics of guidance. In this perspective, rationality does not refer to a transcendental reason, but to historical practices; it does not imply a normative judgement, since it refers to social relations. Foucault makes this point very clear:

"I don't believe one can speak of an intrinsic notion of 'rationalization' without on the one hand positing an absolute value inherent in reason, and on the other taking the risk of applying the term empirically in a completely arbitrary way. I think one must restrict one's use of this word to an instrumental and relative meaning. The ceremony of public torture isn't in itself more irrational than imprisonment in a cell; but it's irrational in terms of a type of penal practice which involves new ways of calculating its utility, justifying it, graduating it, etc. One isn't assessing things in terms of an absolute against which they could be evaluated as constituting more or less perfect forms of rationality, but rather examining how forms of rationality inscribe themselves in practices or systems of practices, and what role they play within them, because it's true that 'practices' don't exist without a certain regime of rationality" (Foucault 1991b, p. 79).

In this perspective, a political rationality is not pure, neutral knowledge which simply "re-presents" the governed reality. It is not an exterior instance, but an element of government itself which helps to create a discursive field in which exercising power is “rational”. The concept of governmentality suggests that it is not only important to see if neo-liberal rationality is an adequate representation of society, but also how it functions as a “politics of truth”, producing new forms of knowledge, inventing new notions and concepts that contribute to the “government” of new domains of regulation and intervention. [4]

The discourse on “sustainable development” might serve as an example to illustrate this point. One important aspect of the “new world order” is the reconceptualization of external nature in terms of an “ecosystem”. Nature, which once meant an independent space clearly demarcated from the social with an independent power to act and regulated by autonomous laws, is increasingly becoming the “environment” of the capitalist system. The ecosystem conception is also a reinvention of the boundaries between nature and society. In view of today’s “global” perils, the main issue now is less the restrictive notion of the “limits of growth” as it is a dynamic growth of limits. In an age of “sustainable development”, previously untapped areas are being opened in the interests of capitalization and chances for commercial exploitation. Nature and life itself are being drawn into the economic discourse of efficient resource management:

“No longer is nature defined and treated as an external, exploitable domain. Through a new process of capitalization, effected primarily by a shift in representation, previously ‘uncapitalized’ aspects of nature and society become internal to capital […] This transformation is perhaps most visible in discussions of rainforest biodiversity: the key to the survival of the rainforest is seen as lying in the genes of the species, the usefulness of which could be released for profit through genetic engineering and biotechnology in the production of commercially valuable products, such as pharmaceuticals. Capital thus develops a

[4] Foucault introduced the notion of problematization in order to more strongly delimit the methodological procedure of „historical nominalism“ and “nominalist critique” (Foucault 1991b, p. 86) in his studies from realistic conceptions, on the one hand, and relativistic positions, on the other. „When I say that I am studying the ‘problematization’ of madness, crime, or sexuality, it is not a way of denying the reality of such phenomena. On the contrary, I have tried to show that it was precisely some real existent in the world which was the target of social regulation at a given moment. The question I raise is this one: How and why were very different things in the world gathered together, characterized, analyzed, and treated as, for example, ‘mental illness’? What are the elements which are relevant for a given ‘problematization’? And even if I won’t say that what is characterized as ‘schizophrenia’ corresponds to something real in the world, this has nothing to do with idealism. For I think there is a relation between the thing which is problematized and the process of problematization. The problematization is an ‘answer’ to a concrete situation which is real” (Foucault 1985b, p. 115; Lemke 1997, pp. 327-46).

conversationalist tendency, significantly different from its usual reckless, destructive form" (Escobar 1996, p. 47; Stickler/Eblinghaus 1996).

Furthermore, the concept of governmentality also helps to pinpoint the strategical character of government. To differenciate between rationalities and technologies of government does not mark the clash of program and reality, the confrontation of the world of discourse and the field of practices. The relations between rationalities and technologies, programs and institutions are much more complex than a simple application or transfer. The difference between the envisioned aims of a program and its actual effects does not refer to the purity of the program and the impurity of reality, but to different realities and heterogenous strategies. History is not the achievement of a plan, but what lies "in between" these levels. Thus, Foucault sees rationalities as part of a reality that is characterised by the permanent "failure" of programs.

Again, let me refer to an example, that Foucault himself provided in *Discipline and Punish*: the failure of the prison system, that produced delinquence as an unintended effect. In his genealogy of the prison, Foucault does not confront reality and intention, nor does he frame the problem in terms of functionality or adequacy. The institutionalization of the prison in the 19th century produced "an entirely unforeseen effect which had nothing to do with any kind of strategic ruse on the part of some meta- or trans-historic subject conceiving and willing it. This effect was the constitution of a delinquent milieu [...]. The prison operated as a process of filtering, concentrating, professionalising and circumscribing a criminal milieu. From about the 1830s onward, one finds an immediate re-utilisation of this unintended, negative effect within a new strategy which came in some sense to occupy this empty space, or transform the negative into a positive. The delinquent milieu came to be re-utilised for diverse political and economic ends, such as the extraction of profit from pleasure through the organisation of prostitution. This is what I call the strategic completion (remplissement) of the apparatus" (Foucault 1980, pp. 195-6)

By reconstructing this "strategical" dimension it is also possible to take more into account the conflicts and resistances that are put forward against technologies and rationalities of government. Struggles and fights do not only take place in an interval "between" programs and their "realisation", they are not limited to some kind of "negative energy" or obstructive capacity. Rather than "distorting" the "original" program, they are actually always already part of the programs themselves, actively contributing to "compromises", "fissures" and "incoherencies" inside them. Thus, the analysis of governmentality does not only take into account "breaks" or "gaps" between program and technology but also inside each of them –

viewing them not as signs of their failure but as the very condition of their existence (see Lemke 2000; O'Malley/Weir/Shearing 1997).

Indeed, we need to refrain from a "rationalist conception of rationality": Neo-liberal practices are not necessarily instable or in crisis, when they rely on increasing social cleavages or relate to an incoherent political program. Neo-liberalism might work not instead of social exclusion and marginalisation processes or political "deficiencies"; on the contrary, relinquishing social securities and political rights might well prove to be its *raison d'étre*.

2.2. Economy and politics

The concept of governmentality also proves to be useful in correcting the diagnosis of neo-liberalism as an expansion of economy in politics, that takes for granted the separation of state and market. The argument goes that there is some "pure" or "anarchic" economy that will be "regulated" or "civilised" by a political reaction of society. But as we know since Marx there is no market independent of the state, and economy is always political economy. The problem with this kind of critique is that it shares the (neo-)liberal programme of a separation between politics and economy. The perspective of governmentality makes possible the development of a dynamic form of analysis that does not limit itself to stating the "retreat of politics" or the "domination of the market" but deciphers the so-called "end of politics" itself as a political programme.

In his work Foucault shows that the "art of government" is not limited to the field of politics as separated from the economy; instead the constitution of a conceptually and practically distinguished space, governed by autonomous laws and a proper rationality is itself an element of "economic" government.[5] Already in his work on discipline Foucault repeatedly pointed out that the power of the economy was vested on a prior "economics of power", since the accumulation of capital presumes technologies of production and forms of labor that enable to put to use a multitude of human beings in an economically profitable manner. Foucault showed that labor power must first be constituted before it can be exploited: that is, that life time must be synthesized into labor time, individuals must be subjugated to the production circle, habits must be formed, and time and space must be organized according to

[5] „Quesnay speaks of good government as ‚economic government'. This latter notion becomes tautological, given that the art of government is just the art of exercising power in the form and according to the model of the economy. But the reason why Quesnay speaks of ‚economic government' is that the word ‚economy' […] is in the process of acquiring a modern meaning, and it is at this moment becoming apparent that the very

a scheme. Thus economic exploitation required a prior "political investment of the body" (Foucault 1977, p. 25). By this theoretical reorientation Foucault hoped to complement and enlarge Marx' critique of political economy with a "critique of political anatomy" .

In this studies on governmentality and his courses at the Collège de France on neo-liberal reason, Foucault takes this form of analysis one step further, combining the "microphysics of power" with the macropolitical question of the state. Again, he does not limit the field of power relations to the government of the state; on the contrary, what Foucault is interested in is the question how power relations historically could concentrate in the form of the state – without ever being reducible to it. Following this line of inquiry, Foucault sees the state as "nothing more that the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentality […] It is necessary to address from an exterior point of view the question of the state, it is necessary to analyse the problem of the state by referring to the practices of government" (Foucault 1984, p. 21). When Foucault speaks of the "governmentalization of the state" (1991a, p. 103), he does not assume that government is a technique, that could be applied or used by state authorities or apparatuses; instead he comprehends the state itself as a tactics of government, as a dynamic form and historic stabilisation of societal power relations. Thus, governmentality is "at once internal and external to the state, since it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on; thus the state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality" (1991a, p. 103).

Foucault's discussion of neo-liberal governmentality shows that the so-called "retreat of the state" is in fact a prolongation of government, neo-liberalism is not the end but a transformation of politics, that restructures the power relations in society. What we observe today is not a diminishment or a reduction of state sovereignty and planning capacities but a displacement from formal to informal techniques of government and the appearance of new actors on the scene of government (e.g. NGOs), that indicate fundamental transformations in statehood and a new relation between state and civil society actors. This encompasses on the one hand the displacement of forms of practices that were formerly defined in terms of nation state to supranational levels, and on the other hand the development of forms of sub-politics "beneath" politics in its traditional meaning. In other words, the difference between state and

essence of government – that is, the art of exercising power in the form of the economy – is to have as its main objective that which we are today accustomed to call ‚the economy'" (Foucault 1991a, p. 92).

society, politics and economy does not function as a foundation or a borderline, but as element and effect of specific neo-liberal technologies of government.

2.3 Domination and technologies of the self

While many forms of contemporary critique still rely on the dualism of freedom and constraint, consensus and violence, from the perspective of governmentality the polarity of subjectivity and power ceases to be plausible: government refers to a continuum, which extends from political government right through to forms of self-regulation, namely "technologies of the self".

This theoretical stance allows for a more complex analysis of neo-liberal forms of government that feature not only direct intervention by means of empowered and specialized state apparatuses, but also characteristically develop indirect techniques for leading and controlling individuals. The strategy of rendering individual subjects "responsible" (and also collectives, such as families, associations, etc.) entails shifting the responsibility for social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty, etc. and for life in society into the domain for which the individual is responsible and transforming it into a problem of "self-care". One key feature of the neo-liberal rationality is the congruence it endeavors to achieve between a responsible and moral individual and an economic-rational individual. It aspires to construct responsible subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts. As the choice of options for action is, or so the neo-liberal notion of rationality would have it, the expression of free will on the basis of a self-determined decision, the consequences of the action are borne by the subject alone, who is also solely responsible for them. This strategy can be deployed in all sorts of areas and leads to areas of social responsibility becoming a matter of personal provisions (Rose & Miller 1992; Garland 1996, p. 452-5; Rose 1996, p. 50-62; O'Malley 1996, p. 199-204).

The point is that it is not sufficient to focus on the destruction of forms of identity without taking into account the production of new modes of subjectivity linked to governmental technologies. A series of studies have elaborated on the various aspects to the transformation in "technologies of the self". I wish to briefly touch on one of them. In her study of the "self esteem" movements in the United States, Barbara Cruikshank shows how the borders between the private and the public are re-drawn in the neo-liberal model of rationality. The "self esteem" approach considers a wide variety of social problems to have their source in a lack of

self esteem on the part of the persons concerned. Cruikshank analyzes the corresponding government programs in California launched on the basis of this assumption and ascertains that their implementation involved more than just replacing the political by the personal and collective action by personal dedication. The "self esteem" movement, Cruikshank suggests, is not limited to the personal domain, as its goal is a new politics and a new social order. It promises to solve social problems by heralding a revolution — not against capitalism, racism, the patriarchy etc., but against the (wrong) way of governing ourselves. In this way, the angle of possible political and social intervention changes. It is not social-structural factors which decide whether unemployment, alcoholism, criminality, child abuse etc. can be solved, but instead individual-subjective categories. "Self esteem" thus has much more to do with self assessment than with self respect, as the self continuously has to be measured, judged, and disciplined in order to gear personal "empowerment" to collective yardsticks. In this manner, a forever precarious harmony (and one which therefore constantly has to be re-assessed) has to be forged between the political goals of the state and a personal "state of esteem" (Cruikshank, 1999; see also Greco, 1993; Nettleton, 1997).

3. Conclusion: governmentality and truth politics

To summarize, the theoretical strength of the concept of governmentality consists of the fact that it construes neo-liberalism not just as ideological rhetoric, as a political-economic reality or as a practical anti-humanism, but above all as a political project that endeavors to create a social reality that it suggests already exists. The analysis of governmentality reminds us that political economy relies on a political anatomy of the body. We can decipher a neo-liberal governmentality in which not only the individual body, but also collective bodies and institutions (public administrations, universities, etc), corporations and states have to be "lean", "fit", "flexible" and "autonomous". The governmentality approach also focuses on the integral link between micro- and macro-political levels (e.g. globalization or competition for "attractive" sites for companies and personal imperatives as regards beauty or a regimented diet). Moreover, it highlights the intimate relationship between "ideological" and "political-economic" agencies (e.g. the semantics of flexibility and the introduction of new structures of production). This enables us to shed sharper light on the effects neo-liberal governmentality has in terms of (self-)regulation and domination. These effects entail not just the simple reproduction of existing social asymmetries or their ideological obfuscation, but are the

product of a re-coding of social mechanisms of exploitation and domination on the basis of a new topography of the social.

Let me conclude to point out very briefly the theoretical implications and the self-critical capacity of such a form of analysis. By situating the processes of theory construction and the invention of concepts in a socio-historical space, the concept of governmentality allows to problematize their truth-effects. It thus becomes possible to account for the performative character of theorizing, that could be comprehended as a form of "truth politics". This "strategical" conception of theory should prevent us from a very serious flaw that dominates much contemporary critique: the "essentialisation of the critique of essentialism". What do I mean by this? When social and political scientists increasingly claim the importance of categories like "invention", "fiction" and "construction" for their work, they often double the theoretical attitude they initially set out to criticise: By firmly believing the "poststructualist" or "anti-essentialist" stance they adopt does signal a "right" or "true" knowledge, they actually take up a theoretical position, Foucault once criticized as "juridico-political discourse" (Foucault 1979, p. 88), since it lacks any sense of the materiality of the process of theory production.

In the perspective of governmentality we always have to reflect on the historical and social conditions that rendered a certain historical knowledge of society "real", taking into account the possible theoretical and non-theoretical consequences of these "truths". It is neccesary not to reverse the theoretical gain of denaturalisation by linking it to a strategy of dematerialisation. And again, this is more than methodological care or a theoretical imperative. When we see the parallelism of the practical interventions of genomic analysis and biotechnological engineering on the one hand and the theoretical appraisal of constructivism on the other, it might be well the case that the increasing acceptance of "anti-essentialist" thought may perfectly well be in harmony with a political rationality that tries to incorporate the last residuals of "nature" in the flexible paradise of neo-liberalism – but only to renaturalise this very form of society as some naturally given.

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